

Cannabis edibles already harming kids, new data show

■ Cite as: *CMAJ* 2019 July 15;191:E801. doi: 10.1503/cmaj.109-5789

Posted on cmajnews.com on June 27, 2019.

More than a dozen children suffered serious or life-threatening events linked to recreational cannabis in the months around legalization, according to preliminary data from a Canadian Paediatric Surveillance Program (CPSP) study.

“These numbers are really the tip of the iceberg,” said Dr. Christina Grant, co-principal investigator. The study captures only the most serious adverse events involving cannabis that resulted in hospitalizations, permanent disability and death, she explained. It doesn’t include visits to family doctors or emergency departments, which are likely many more.

Between September and December 2018, 16 cases of serious adverse events involving cannabis were reported to CPSP. Researchers verified 11 of these cases, six of which involved young children accidentally consuming cannabis edibles that belonged to a parent or grandparent. All involved hospitalizations. At least one involved an infant.

“The number of cases involving young children is striking,” said Grant. “These early results highlight the urgency of prioritizing the needs of children and youth in policy and education initiatives, especially as edibles become legalized later this year.”

Edible cannabis products pose a high risk to children because it’s easy to take too much and they can be mistaken for ordinary treats. Physicians should advise adults who are using edibles to keep them locked up, and make sure teens understand that edibles work differently than smoked cannabis, Grant said. The effect is not as quick. “They



Six young children were hospitalized last year because they ate cannabis products belonging to parents or grandparents.

take the edible and they don’t feel anything, and 20 minutes later, they have more and get into problems.”

In February, the Canadian Paediatric Society recommended that Health Canada ban cannabis products resembling gummy bears or other treats that may be attractive to children when edibles become legal in the fall. The government is, instead, proposing to lower the THC content in those products. “That may result in less harm,” said Grant. “But again, if you’re talking about children, the actual dose they’re getting is still high, and it depends on how these products are packaged. Is it a bunch of candies in a package or just one?”

Colorado imposed a ban on edibles that looked like kids’ treats, among other emergency regulations, after a young tourist fatally jumped from a hotel balcony after eating too many pieces of a pot cookie. According to marijuana czar Andrew Freedman, the state was unprepared for the risks posed by edibles. At the peak of the problem, there were 230 poison control calls in a year.

So far, there have been no deaths related to cannabis reported in Canada. Grant’s study will continue until October 2020 and will monitor trends following the legalization of edibles in the fall.

Lauren Vogel, *CMAJ*